

# Between Transnationalism and Localization: The Pan-European TV Miniseries *14 - Diaries of the Great War*

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## **Abstract**

*14 – Diaries of the Great War* is a transmedial project consisting of a documentary TV-series, a website, a radio programme, a photo book and a museum exhibition, produced for the centenary of World War One in 2014. The project was created by a transnational collaboration and aimed for a transnational audience. The TV-series aspired to create a new kind of historical documentary, showing history as it was experienced by ordinary people. This article compares how *14 – Diaries of the Great War* was realised and received in Great Britain, Germany, Denmark and Sweden. We argue that the TV-series, in spite of its transnational origin and ambitions was in effect being localized and re-nationalized, as it was adapted to the presumed preferences of national audiences.

## **Keywords**

Transnational memory; World War One centenary; commemoration; TV documentary; *14 – Diaries of the Great War*; transmediality

## **Résumé**

*14 - Diaries of the Great War* est un projet transmédia réalisé à l'occasion du centenaire du début de la Première Guerre mondiale en 2014 et comprenant une série documentaire télévisée, un site Web, une émission radio, un livre de photos et une exposition de musée. Ce projet est né d'une collaboration transnationale et visait un public transnational. La série documentaire télévisée avait comme objectif de créer un nouveau genre de documentaire historique en montrant l'histoire telle qu'elle avait été vécue par les gens ordinaires. Cet article se propose de comparer la manière dont *14 – Diaries of the Great War* a été réalisé et reçu en Grande-Bretagne, en Allemagne, au Danemark et en Suède. Nous démontrons que la série télévisée, en dépit de son origine et de ses ambitions transnationales, a en réalité été localisée et renationalisée durant le processus d'adaptation pour répondre aux préférences présumées des publics nationaux.

## **Mots-clés**

Mémoire transnationale; centenaire de la Première Guerre mondiale; commémoration; documentaire télévisé; *14 – Diaries of the Great War*; transmédialité

Commemorative events such as World War One centenary are increasingly moving not only beyond the national framework but also beyond the political alliances shaped by these events.<sup>1</sup> At the same time, media companies are eager to take advantage of a deregulated European television market to finance ambitious projects through transnational collaborations.<sup>2</sup> By working not only across different countries but also across different media, they maximize the reach of their products both in terms of audiences and economic revenue.

A good example of this marketing strategy is *14 – Diaries of the Great War*, a project consisting of a trans-European documentary drama series,<sup>3</sup> a website, a radio program,<sup>4</sup> a photo book, and a temporary museum exhibition, all produced for the centenary of World War One in 2014. The project was realized on different media platforms, with each platform combining various media forms. The project's aim was to provide access to historical archives, remediate personal stories and situate them within a historical framework. The website [www.14-tagebuecher.de](http://www.14-tagebuecher.de) allows users to navigate their own path through the maze of narratives, locations and background information. The special exhibition at the Military History Museum in Dresden, “14 – Menschen – Krieg” (14 – People – War), which ran from August 1, 2014 until February 24, 2015, combined artifacts with documentary footage and stills from the TV series to contextualize the fate of 14 protagonists, whose personal stories are the main focus of the series, in the wider narrative of World War One. We are given insight into experiences recorded by individuals who found themselves on different sides of the conflict, making it particularly compelling.

Before production started, the concept of the mini-series was circulated for preview, to convince different national broadcasters to pre-purchase it. This necessitated the development of a format that provided a multi-national perspective and was adaptable for audiences from different countries. The resulting versions tailored by national broadcasters show a resilience of the national, which allows us to distinguish between memories that travel (Erll 2011, 4) – what Ann Rigney calls ‘subtitled memories’ (2012, 622) – and memories that do not.

This article explores the ways in which the inherently transnational project of *14 – Diaries of the Great War* was realized in four European countries: Great Britain, Germany, Denmark and Sweden. We compare the different national versions of the TV drama documentary, which was the main part of the project and certainly the part that travelled the most, and we analyze how it was received and discussed in these countries. In doing so, we investigate the complex dynamics between the transnational origin and ambitions of the project and what turned out in effect to be its localization, or re-nationalization, as the TV docudrama was adapted to the presumed preferences of national audiences.

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1 Looking at the centenary, the remembrance activities clearly reflect current political alliances and foreign policy agendas: in a combined ceremony, German President Joachim Gauck together with French President François Hollande commemorated the beginning of World War One at the memorial Hartmannsweilerkopf, where previously only French soldiers had been remembered. Not only was the memorial re-dedicated to remember the French as well as the German soldiers who died there, but the two Presidents also laid the foundation for the first German-French museum on World War One to open its doors in 2017 (Soldt 2014).

2 European co-productions by the German television companies ARD/ZDF more than doubled between 2003 and 2013 from 239 hours to 623 hours.

3 The production team at the German film company LOOKS also produced a TV series for children, “Small Hands in a Big War” (TV-Mini-Series 2014), using toy animation for some of the most gruesome parts of the stories. The series was screened on Welsh TV and also in Scandinavian countries (but not in Germany).

4 Beginning March 9, 2014, the German television station WDR broadcasted a six-part radio documentary by Christine Sievers and Nicolaus Schröder also titled *14 – Diaries of the Great War*. This series was based on and created in collaboration with the makers of the TV series.

# 1. Pan-European Ideas, Teams, and Experiences

The expressed aim of the makers of *14 – Diaries of the Great War* was to find an alternative approach to historical documentary, inviting viewers to “experience World War One solely through the eyes of those who lived it”, providing them with a sense of “what it was like” (“14” - LOOKS) to live through this war from the viewpoint of participants and eyewitnesses. Rather than using an extradiegetic narrator speaking in hindsight, the makers drew on diaries and letters to convey the protagonists’ most intimate thoughts and feelings, at the same time widening the perspective to incorporate both Western and Eastern Fronts, soldiers and civilians, friend and foe, men and women, adults and children, revealing “the simple human experience of 1914-18, unsullied by historical interpretation” (“Great War Diaries”). This discourse of ‘authenticity’ and the aim to transcend boundaries between public and private and between different nationally coded memories is at the heart of the project. Yet the present-day voice is clearly discernable, not only in the filmmakers’ choice of film extracts, photographs and quotations from a total of 1,000 letters, diaries, memoirs, telegrams and postcards, but also and most importantly in the adoption of a multi-national perspective to tell a transmedia story that challenges the pastness of the archive.

The question remains whether the transmedia storytelling of the *14 – Diaries of the Great War* project, as a form of “re-telling, re-membling” (Elsaesser 1996, 146) across different media, helps to negotiate and rethink the relationship between personal and public memory. Transmedia storytelling is a response to the proliferation of media formats and delivery technologies, predominantly used by media companies to accelerate and optimize the “flow of media content across delivery channels to expand revenue opportunities, broaden markets, and reinforce viewer commitments” (Jenkins 2006, 18). In contrast to adaptation, it is not a translation from one medium to another, but rather a media network that makes use of very different expressive resources (Ryan 2005, 1). According to Jenkins, a transmedia story is

integrating multiple texts to create a narrative so large that it cannot be contained in one single medium ... [It] unfolds across multiple media platforms with each new text, making a distinctive and valuable contribution to the whole. In the ideal form of transmedia storytelling, each medium does what it does best—so that a story might be introduced in a film, expanded through television, novels, and comics; its world might be explored through game play or experienced as an amusement park attraction. (Jenkins 2006, 95-96)

In its strictest sense, users do not choose between, for example, the book or film version; instead, each medium provides one piece of the puzzle. In our example, this is not necessarily the case: while this project is certainly symptomatic of our increasingly convergent media environment (Meikle/Young 2012, 2), different media versions can be consumed separately and even independently of each other.

The idea for *14 – Diaries of the Great War* was born in the Leipzig-based LOOKS film company – an independent producer of documentaries – as the brainchild of Gunnar Dedio (LOOKS) and Ulrike Dotzer (from the Franco-German TV channel ARTE). As a niche multi-lingual broadcaster, ARTE has a transnational mission: what started out in 1990 as a joint initiative of French and German public-service broadcasters has constantly broadened its reach through agreements with associated members from other countries, for

example with the BBC and Sweden's SVT. ARTE has retained its pan-European outlook and the politically motivated aim of creating a more integrated European space of communication, which means that international productions are usually screened with subtitles, which was also the case for *14 – Diaries of the Great War*.

The program was produced by LOOKS Film Leipzig, Les Films d'Ici Paris and Filmoption International Montreal as a collaboration among 17 European broadcasters and was sold to more than 25 countries worldwide. "As legal, economic and technological opportunities for transnational communication multiplied and met with a European political will to open up national media spaces" (Brüggemann/Schulz-Forberg 2009, 707), LOOKS seized the chance to produce something that could appeal to a pan-European audience. In order to create a multi-faceted story told from different viewpoints in terms of nationality<sup>5</sup>, ethnicity, age (children and adults) and gender, they drew together a pan-European (Dutch, British, French, Austrian, Italian, Russian) team of actors and film crew. But while the documentary was described as "television's global event for the centenary of World War One" ("Great War Diaries"), the radio program, website, exhibition and photo book<sup>6</sup> lack this pan-European dimension.

For the TV docudrama, the brothers Gunnar and Florian Dedio chose fourteen voices from seven countries involved in the conflict. These protagonists reappear throughout the episodes with multiple plotlines that allow the audiences to become engrossed in the fates of the main characters or, as the Dedio brothers put it: "We live – and sometimes die – with our characters" ("14" - LOOKS). With its mix of reconstructed drama scenes, repurposed archival footage, animation and cinematic film score, the TV series maximizes the emotional power of immersion. Viewers join the characters in the midst of action; for example, when shells explode around Yves Congar's home in Sedan (France), the camera shakes and dust lands on the lens. When the Russian Cossack Marina Yurlova talks about her experience with a gas mask and how it makes the world around her feel unreal and herself indifferent to the surrounding carnage, robbing her of all compassion and empathy for her fellow soldiers, viewers really do see through her eyes, or rather through the two round circles of her mask and its limited perspective. *14 – Diaries of the Great War* attempts to create the immediacy of first-hand experience, which Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin (1999, 20-21) describe as the dialectical relationship between hypermediacy, that is, the extensive use of media to create spectacular imagery, and immediacy, the illusion of no mediation. "Markers of real authenticity" (King 2005, 50), such as a shaking camera, are achieved through hypermediation, drawing attention to the fact that this scene is in fact filmed, and yet by pretending that the camera is present when bombs fall and is as afflicted as the characters, it creates the illusion of being a participant in World War One and a first hand witness.

As audiences we are offered insights into the protagonists' most intimate feelings and thoughts, yet this does not necessarily allow for an identificatory viewing experience. Instead, the viewing experience veers between uneasy recognition and the desire to distance ourselves, for example, from the indoctrination and bouts of paranoid patriotism that even socialists such as Käthe and Karl Kollwitz display ("Everybody is against us."). Far from being shown as an unproblematic 'window into the past', the personal point of view is revealed as subject to and formed by propaganda. The workings of war propaganda and its effects on all

5 Non-European voices are only present in the person of Ethel Cooper, an Australian piano teacher living in Leipzig. The 'we' established in the voice-over ('we got accustomed to speed') narrows the perspective to a discourse of European modernity at the beginning of the twentieth century.

6 Published by BBC Books in the UK and Bucher Verlag in Germany, the book exists in English and German versions. The website offers German and French versions.

central characters, most disturbingly on the children, cast doubt on the reliability of contemporary newspaper reports, newsreels and ‘authentic footage’.

Film and photographic archive material from a total of 71 archives in 21 countries was rescanned to bring out the clarity and detail of the originals. The Dedio brothers drew heavily on the rediscovered photographic collection of the German photographer and entrepreneur August Fuhrmann, an archive of thousands of stereoscopic photographs taken all over the world between 1880-1918 and coloured by porcelain painters, which they supplemented with black and white photographs from Allied sources. The glass slides were featured in Fuhrmann’s invention, the immensely popular Kaiser Panorama, now probably best known through Walter Benjamin’s *One Way Street*. The Panorama was a wooden circular device that could be used by up to 25 viewers at a time; as these watched through viewing lenses, pictures rotated within a carousel and were illuminated from the rear to create a three-dimensional effect. Acoustic programs with oral presentations and musical accompaniment were widespread at the end of the nineteenth century, and, together with the effects of lighting, dimming and blending so-called ‘dissolving pictures’, became one of the precursors of cinema – a technology into which Fuhrmann never ventured. In 1914, Fuhrmann’s devices were recruited as a propaganda tool by the authorities and used for special demonstrations advertised as ‘war panoramas’. As the situation on the Western Front became increasingly bloody, bleak and deadlocked, the inhabitants of Berlin saw sanitized stereoscopic images of dry, clean and orderly trenches, occupied by impeccably dressed and well-drilled German soldiers. The small army of photographers who took these photographs for the purpose of public viewing was limited not only by the technologies available at the time and the (im)practicalities of filming battlefield events, but even more importantly by censorship.

According to film and photography historians such as Michael Griffin (1999, 124), World War One was the first war in which film was purposefully produced and used to manipulate both soldiers and civilians on the home front. The program producers draw audiences’ attention to various forms of indoctrination by showing how schools, newspapers and war propaganda worked hand in hand. While the integrity of the archival document is cited as their mandate for effective dramatisation, while archival footage is revealed as propagandistic, staged and ‘faked’, the drama scenes specifically filmed for 14 – Diaries of the Great War are celebrated for their authenticity: “The emphasis in the drama scenes will be on authenticity, taking the viewer out of the stereotypes of World War One reconstructions. Far from feeling that they are watching black-and-white events that have no connection to their own lives, our audiences will find themselves saying: that could have been me” (“14” - LOOKS). The actors impersonating the historic characters transform the written testimonies into live oral narration, thus producing a sense of presence and present-ness, an illusion of direct communication across 100 years. As the idea of truth “has slowly and painfully withered under the assault of various anti-foundational epistemologies, memory seems to have claimed Truth’s valorized position as a site of authenticity” (Bell 2003, 65). The perspective offered to audiences is one of emotional involvement, and yet it is the audiences’ ‘prosthetic memory’ (Landsberg 2004, 19) that is privileged in this scenario, rather than the limited and ideologically tainted personal experiences and recollections of the characters. As Smelik (2010, 311) points out, “it is as if the media have taken over the promise of immediacy and authenticity from memory.”

In the foreword for the photo book, Peter Englund writes: “Like the passions that once intoxicated them or



tormented them, the people you will meet in this book are themselves all gone now, but something of them and of the event is still present inside us” (Dedio 2014, 7). This kind of ‘memory work’ (Kuhn 2010, 2) concentrates on us, the viewers, and on the question how present viewers relate to the past in the here and now. In contrast, the Dedio brothers’ invitation to the public marks a major shift in the kind of ‘memory work’ in which viewers are asked to engage: “Travel through time with us into the hearts and minds of our forefathers” (Dedio 2014, 9). The notion of time travel disregards the fact that memory is always operating in and from the present, and implies that we can gain access to our forefathers’ thoughts and feelings through an empathic encounter which, as the term suggests, runs along genealogical, ethnic and national bonds.

In a mix of official and vernacular memory, each story is introduced by archival photos, an animated montage of family photographs, propaganda images and postcards, similar to the voice-over which, at least in the original version, blends authorial narrator and first person perspective. Historic photographic portraits dissolve into the actors’ faces, and by doing so they break the taboo of the fourth wall, addressing the audience and telling their stories directly to the camera. This interpellation has the effect of drawing viewers in, but by breaking the illusion it also becomes a distancing device. The same strategies that signal realism and authenticity, inviting viewers to feel close to the events and the protagonists, also have an alienating effect. The fact that English characters are played by English actors, Russians by Russians, Germans by Germans who talk in their own language, enhances their credibility, but the subtitles introduce an additional filter through which the characters’ emotional turmoil is experienced. The question of how voices can travel in audio-visual media across linguistic borders is still open for debate. This constant oscillation between closeness and distance makes for an intriguing but also difficult viewing experience. Most of the time the film footage is used to illustrate the protagonists’ words, but there are also scenes in which words and images are in stark contrast, such as a voice-over reading of the euphemistic phrases used in telegrams and letters sent to the families of killed soldiers. Archival footage shows the stark reality of an utterly unheroic death: while the telegrams talk of brave attacks and proper burials, the bloated bodies tell a different story.

## 2. The National Versions

The TV documentary series was the part of this transmedia project that travelled most. In doing so, it was either cut or expanded and reedited, in an effort to adapt the series to different national preferences, which resulted in a variety of narrative structures and perspectives. The following offers an analysis of the versions produced in four countries: 1) Germany is the home of the initiators, the production company and the driving force behind the project; 2) Britain is relevant as a country that has developed a distinct and highly invested narrative around World War One; 3) Denmark and 4) Sweden were only marginally affected by World War One and have no major investment in its commemoration but still bought the series.

While the Franco-German television channel ARTE and the Danish broadcaster DR screened the original eight one-hour parts (in Denmark with added Danish subtitles), most national broadcasters offered a different version by assembling their own montage of vignettes or even producing additional material. The Austrian channel ORF 2 and the German broadcaster ARD showed four 45-minute parts on two consecutive days (May 28-29, 2014), while in the UK the BBC cut it down to three parts. The Dutch broadcasters NTR and VPRO added rather than cut and produced an additional episode about World War One in the Netherlands. Sweden’s

SVT commissioned several additional segments for their airing of the series, including introductions to each episode by historian Peter Englund (who also wrote the introduction for the photo book). These versions differ not only in length, but more importantly in how the stories are presented and add up to an overarching narrative. While audience numbers fell short of target ratings in both the UK (4.8% achieved vs. 6.1% forecasted) and Germany (8.1% achieved vs. 12% forecasted), Sweden's average rating was nearly as high as in the UK (4%) and Austria's was higher than any other country's (14%) ("14" – Wikipedia).

The original series opener features six protagonists: the German artist Käthe Kollwitz who lost her son Peter; the Russian Cossack girl Marina Yurlova who, at only 14 years old, followed her father into the war; the Austrian farmer Karl Kasser, a rather reluctant soldier; the traumatized American-Italian volunteer Vincenzo d'Aquila; the French boy Yves Congar and the German girl Elfriede Kuhr who both experienced the threatening approach of the war in their respective hometowns on the Western and Eastern Fronts. In contrast, the first episode of the British version loses this focus on the first few weeks of the war, since it incorporates the narrative strands of all four British protagonists and even changes the beginning. Rather than experiencing the disembodied voice of the 'collective narrator' setting the scene of pre-war Europe over archival footage, followed by the opening sequence with Marina Yurlova bewildered by church bells ringing, the viewer is introduced to Sarah Broom Macnaughtan, an elderly upper-class Scottish nurse, reminiscing in a London park about her training Boy Scouts.

It was important for the program producers that all characters spoke in their native language. While the BBC followed this concept by subtitling dialogues in the re-enacted scenes, all the voice-over monologues, consisting of extracts from letters and diaries were dubbed as British audiences would expect from documentaries: the characters speak English with their respective native accents (for example, Käthe Kollwitz's voice has a strong German accent). The German version uses a third-person narrator who contextualizes each of the protagonists' personal situations and provides background information on their respective country. Thus the narration alternates between the 'voice of history' and the 'voice of the people' ('like children *we* were intoxicated by the speed with which modern technology had presented us') (*14* - film). In the British version the protagonists introduce themselves; the 'voice of history' is edited out and with it statements such as 'the Austrian generals called for a war on terrorism' (*14* - film) that reveal a post-9/11 perspective on the events.<sup>7</sup> The British version enhances the 'nowness' already inherent in the medium of television, thereby creating a 'history in the present tense' (Williams 2009: 211).

Whereas British investment in the centenary commemorations has been considerable both in terms of financial support and identity politics and Germany has attempted to revive remembrance of World War One by disentangling it from World War Two (cp. Arnold-de Simine 2015, 147), Sweden and Denmark share a similarly distanced perspective on World War One. Nevertheless, the documentary series received very different treatment in those two countries. Swedish television screened *14 – Diaries of the Great War* in the summer of 2014, precisely at the time the centenary of the war's beginning was being commemorated intensely throughout Europe. All eight episodes were shown on Swedish TV's main channel, TV1, during

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<sup>7</sup> In the original version, Germany's responsibility, specifically the fact that the Kaiser and his advisors urged Austria to deal with Serbia promptly and ruthlessly, is never clearly stated. Britain is implicitly blamed for the escalation because its colonies transformed a European conflict into a world war. The war crimes the German army committed in Belgium are mentioned, but it is also stated that they were exaggerated for the purpose of British war propaganda, which relied on the ideological mobilization of volunteers, and that the Austrian atrocities against the Serbs were far worse.

prime time. Danish national television showed the series later in the summer on one of the smaller channels, the culture channel DRK, on Monday evenings, after a documentary on Celtic religion.<sup>8</sup> Initially it was watched by around 36,000 viewers, constituting only 2.4% of the presumed Danish total.<sup>9</sup> While Swedish national television obviously saw the series as an important investment and scheduled the screening accordingly, Danish television considered it less important. This can hardly have been because the Great War had a smaller impact in Denmark than in Sweden. At least 4,000 soldiers of Danish nationality were killed while fighting on the German side in World War One (Bundgård Christensen 2009, 419). Nevertheless, in the summer of 2014, World War One attracted less attention on Danish television screens than on Swedish ones.

There may be several reasons for Danish national television's having given the series lower priority. The channel DRK led the commemoration of the centenary of World War One on Danish TV screens and had pre-booked *14 – Diaries of the Great War* as the culmination of its centenary schedule (Polk 2016). The main channel DR1 was preoccupied with the much anticipated and later much criticized historical drama series *1864*, the most expensive Danish TV-production ever, supported by direct funding from the Danish Parliament (Boesen 2013; Blüdnikow and Lindberg 2014; Mulvihill 2015). *1864* was produced to coincide with the 150th anniversary of the Danish military defeat by Bismarck's Prussia, which resulted in the loss of one third of the country's territory to Germany. As a national, historical, and media event, *1864* overshadowed *14 – Diaries of the Great War*.

The Danish channel DRK screened *14 – Diaries of the Great War* in the original German version, with the German narrator and the different characters talking in their own languages, all with Danish subtitles. According to one employee at DR, this is part of the Danish tradition of “never versioning imported programs” (Bom personal interview). Apart from the subtitles, nothing was done to make the series more appealing or comprehensible to Danish viewers.

In contrast, Swedish television produced its own version of *14 – Diaries of the Great War*, which then became a Swedish co-production, tailor-made for screening on the main Swedish channel. Each episode of the Swedish version is introduced by the Swedish historian Peter Englund, who points out the importance and lasting effects of the World War One on world history. The German narration was translated into Swedish. Most importantly, the Swedish episodes include short sections depicting how the war was experienced in Sweden or by Swedes. Seven Swedish characters, four men and three women, were added to the original fourteen. Some of these characters participate directly in the war as volunteers or nurses, while others observe and comment from a distance or mainly experience the war as lack of food and other necessities among Sweden's urban poor (“Det Stora Kriget: Stor dokumentärsatsning”). Thus, the Swedish episodes add a dimension of how the war was experienced in a country not directly involved but still affected by the war. The episodes presenting the experience of Swedish characters were produced in a style very similar to the original. The dramatisations shift between group action, dialogues and the main characters narrating their experiences directly to the camera. Authentic footage is included as well, such as the case of the meeting of the three Scandinavian kings in December 1914. Like the original fourteen characters, the Swedish characters present the viewpoint of

<sup>8</sup> Both Sweden and Denmark have public, state-subsidized television. In Denmark this encompasses all of the broadcaster DR's channels.

<sup>9</sup> Since the program was rescreened at odd hours throughout the week, again in the autumn of 2015, and also made available for streaming, the actual number of viewers may have been significantly higher, according to interviews and email correspondence with editors at DR (Kastoft 2016, Bom email).



‘ordinary’ people from various age groups and positions in society (Englund 2009, 9; Oscarsson 2014).

The Swedish production also had its own transmedia life. Peter Englund was involved in the original production of the *14 – Diaries of the Great War* series as one of three historical advisors credited by LOOKS film. His book *The Beauty and the Sorrow - An Intimate History of World War One*, based on first-hand accounts from nineteen individuals, served as a source of inspiration for the docudrama. Englund used the Swedish screening as the occasion to launch a new five-volume version of his book, extended to forty characters and to be published one volume per year from 2014 to 2018 (Lenas 2014; Elam 2015). Moreover, the Swedish version of the television series also resulted in an additional miniseries screened in the autumn of 2014, *The Great War – Swedish Destinies*, providing a closer insight into the Swedish characters included in the Swedish version of *14 – Diaries of the Great War* (“Det Stora Kriget - Svenska Öden”).

While both the TV-series and Englund’s work attracted media attention in Sweden, the series was not much noticed in Denmark (e.g. Oscarsson 2014; Schwartz 2014). In part, this is a question of strategic investment choices: Danish TV gave priority to *1864*. Through *14 – Diaries of the Great War*, World War One became a more important part of Swedish memory, while it remains a “forgotten war” (Bundgård Christensen 2009, cover) in Denmark. It seems that a series such as *14 – Diaries of the Great War* still needs to go through a national *reversioning* (see Keilbach in this issue) in order to appeal to broader audiences and to national television program editors alike.

Even though the TV series offers a multi-national perspective, the program’s tailoring by different national broadcasters means that the narrative they provide is still anchored in a national perspective and that historical identity is inevitably cast as national identity. This can also be traced to the program’s media reception in different countries: German media celebrated the TV series for emotionalizing history (Friederichs 2014; Hanselmann 2014; Strobel 2014) and for its aesthetic experiments in the genre of the docudrama (Felix-Kellerhoff 2014). Lorenz Jäger (2014) in the *FAZ* calls the narrative technique “revolutionary” and the story itself “gripping, emotional, and real. A milestone for European television.” The reaction in France and the Netherlands was equally enthusiastic: *Le Monde* ascribes to the series “a never before seen virtuosity” (Catinchi 2014), while *Direct Matin* (2014, 20) highlights its “exceptional quality”. The Dutch version of the series was described as follows by the *NRC Handelsblad*: “Fantastic television making ... we ride a rollercoaster of emotions, as if we are not supposed to understand history but rather to live it ourselves” (Beerekamp 2014). While in most countries the series was met with overwhelming praise, the British response was mixed. *The Guardian* review found that “it was a mark of the program’s success that you had to remind yourself whose side you were on” (Hogan 2014). *The Telegraph* complained that it “fell short on the one thing it should have delivered – real emotion” because the effect was “distancing rather than engaging. A case, perhaps, of too many broadcasters spoiling the broth: the need to see things from every point of view, to cater for all sensitivities, resulting in a bland blancmange, a typical Euro-pudding” (O’Donovan 2014).

Even in its adapted form, the British version of the series is missing core narratives that were established in the context of the British centenary: it offers no testimonies of violated Belgium civilians, no poignant and tragic stories of young soldiers.<sup>10</sup> In all cases where idealism and stoicism are shown, these qualities are

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10 The BBC version omitted all (sexually explicit) love stories from their version apart from the chaste romance between the teenager Elfriede Kuhr and the young flight lieutenant Werner Waldecker.

exploited and eventually undermined, revealed at best as naïve and at worst as absolutely meaningless. These revelations had an affective force that was expected to reverberate across generations and national audiences, but they jarred with a British narrative that has moved away from previous popular interpretations of the World War One as futile, “dreadful waste” and senseless slaughter, and increasingly portrays the war as a just fight against an “aggressive enemy bent on achieving hegemony in Europe” (Sheffield 2013), a sentiment which conveniently echoes current political concerns.<sup>11</sup>

### 3. The Complementary Role of Social Media

A marked difference in the way the program was received can be seen in British and German discussion forums. British comments on Twitter #Great War Diaries praise the series and testify to highly emotional reactions, describing it as “harrowing”, “moving” and “heart-wrenching”. The majority is clearly unaware of its pan-European framework, attributing it to the BBC or even ITV, suggesting that they did not watch the program on television but streamed it online. Comments on the program’s Facebook fan site from the German public-service broadcaster ARD overwhelmingly feature discussion threads around the current political situation in the EU. Claims that this series powerfully brings home the futility and personal tragedy of all wars attracted disparaging and cynical responses from users who described this sentiment as trite and meaningless.

But there is also a generational divide in how the program was received. Reactions to the program on social media tell us more than mainstream press reviews about how the series speaks to a non-TV audience of younger people who practice a self-curated, interactive approach to media offerings, and, if they watch TV programs at all, do so on YouTube, Netflix or other digital media platforms. Despite its inherently transmedial character, the *14 – Diaries of the Great War* project did not massively penetrate social media. Its presence on Facebook was limited to a simple page with a few hundred ‘likes’ that linked to a Wikipedia article on the project. The BBC blog, Reddit and Twitter show only a handful of threads and limited discussion of the program. On YouTube, however, people watched and engaged with the series.

YouTube, like other types of social media, permits its users to react quickly, anonymously and largely without regulation, as long as they are logged in through a Google profile. Yet the level of audience engagement varies significantly. Whereas some users engage in active networks of enthusiasts, most of YouTube’s audience simply treats the service as a large library of films, clips and videos of all kinds that allows you to search for what you want when you want it (Lindgren 2010, 2011). YouTube users’ relationship to the concepts of ownership and copyright is often rather unclear. Since user-generated content is considered unfinished, recyclable input (van Dijck 2013, 35-36), this mindset seems to spill over to the uploading of videos tapped from commercial TV channels. Despite YouTube’s and Google’s legal battles and efforts to make users respect professional copyrights, users upload films and TV programs such as *14 Diaries – Diaries of the Great War – Diaries of the Great War*, sometimes in full length and sometimes as sections or parts of user-generated content. This potentially gives films and TV productions an afterlife on YouTube and creates possibilities to follow reception statistics in the form of likes or non-likes, comments and even redistribution as part of user-generated content.

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<sup>11</sup> Prime Minister David Cameron’s fear of a German-dominated European Union clearly shines through when he claims, “there was a cause that young men rallied to at the beginning of the war, which was the idea that Europe shouldn’t be dominated by one power” (Mason 2014).

The Swedish version of *14 Diaries – Diaries of the Great War* was made available on YouTube in the summer of 2014, shortly after it was screened on SVT1. By March 2016, the first episode had been seen more than 38,000 times, with numbers dropping for the following episodes.<sup>12</sup> The British and German versions of *14 Diaries – Diaries of the Great War* had different afterlives on YouTube, possibly because of more careful attention to copyrights. While the complete British version was not available, episodes 1, 5 and 6 were uploaded on YouTube in April 2015. By March 2016, the first episode had been viewed 2,630 times and received one comment thanking the uploader, while numbers of views dropped for episodes 5 and 6. An upload of the complete German version was available on YouTube from December 2015. The first episode had been viewed 732 times by March 2016, with numbers dropping for the following episodes. The settings of this upload did not allow comments. The explanation for the Swedish version's having attracted more of a YouTube audience than the British and German versions may well be that the Swedish series was made available shortly after its screening on TV, thus benefitting from media attention around the production as well as the momentum of the centenary. The British and German uploads came too late for that.

Trailers to the series circulated widely, receiving occasional comments expressing gratitude or critique on the lack of historical accuracy. Moreover, YouTube users cut sections out of the series and re-edited them into sequences presenting favourite characters and actors. In March 2016, several versions presenting only the parts on Ernst Jünger or Marina Yurlova existed, as well as one featuring the Italian soldier Vincenzo D'Aquila. These were taken from various national versions of the series, viewed several thousand times and commented on in Russian and Italian. In this way, YouTube users transformed what was originally a complex multi-perspectival narrative into simple stories of only one individual in the war.

## 4. Conclusion

If memory is “something we do rather than something we have” (Olick 2008, 159), then we need to examine not only stories that are shared and contested and the frameworks in which they are couched, but also their modes of articulation, the arenas for these mnemonic forms, contents and practices, their social actors and participants. We explored these memory dynamics by focusing on one particular case study, *14 – Diaries of the Great War*, both a transnational and a transmedia project. In the attempt to construct new media temporalities and subjectivities, transmedia storytelling has become a vital part of postmodern historiography with its focus on memory, fragmentary stories and multiple points of view, with its self-reflexive stance and its reinterpretation of authenticity in rethinking the relationship between fact and fiction.

*14 – Diaries of the Great War* proposes a new type of historical memory, making its claim to authenticity through the personal individual narrative as a form of highly mediated and dramatized oral history or testimony,

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12 By March 27, 2016, the first episode had 38,123 views. This number dropped significantly to 20,156 for the second episode, 10,299 for the third, and between 5,301 and 8,155 for the remaining five episodes. The viewers left few reactions: only 118 persons “liked” the first episode, while nine had “not liked” it. The first episode received nineteen comments, the majority of which basically thanked the uploader for making the documentary available. One commentator, presumably a teacher, thanked on behalf of two school classes. Of the thirteen comments on the last seven episodes, most were thankful to the uploader or appreciated having “learned a lot of facts,” as one user expressed herself. Some showed emotional reactions: one mentioned “the ruthless British who let the populations of the Empire fight and die for something that wasn’t of their concern,” and a comment on the final episode stated that “This was a fantastic *story* of World War One.” This final comment was actually the only one seemingly reflecting on the way the series was produced, recognizing that this was indeed a hybrid composition of individuals’ narratives (“Det stora kriget – Dokumentär om första världskriget, del 1-8”).

set in the context of strong effects and emotional immersion. The very closeness experienced by the viewer and the recognizable humanity of the characters appeal to compassion and empathy and make the characters appear familiar. Yet in spite of its personal and generally human appeal, this inherently transnational production was translated into more local versions when it was screened on national television. The documentary series *14 – Diaries of the Great War* certainly travelled, but the degree to which it was distributed, as well as how it was reversioned to comply with national standards and narratives, were very much the result of choices made by the national television channels. Television planners made these choices based on assumptions as to which preferences and interests their national audiences would have, both with regards to format (length, language, composition) and content. While the BBC foregrounded British characters and Swedish television added in sections with Swedish characters and perspectives, Danish television simply deemed it insufficiently national to appear on the main state channel. These actions thus contributed to the containment of World War One memory mediation within, or in the Danish case, rather outside established national frameworks, thereby limiting the transnational potential of a project such as *14 – Diaries of the Great War* before it was even broadcasted.

While the format of the documentary series and the transmedia character of the *14 – Diaries of the Great War* project add new qualities to the historical documentary, we cannot necessarily detect a new type of reception. The format certainly speaks to professional reviewers, but the series did not leave significant traces on social media or show any evidence of resonating emotively with a wider audience. If there was an audience, the large majority of it stayed rather silent about its experience. Yet outside the scope of the original project, the series had a varied afterlife on the Internet, also being involved in grass-root versions of remediation, where YouTube consumer-producers selected sections of the TV series, circulated them with comments, linked them to related material, and even reedited and recomposed these as completely new narrative segments.

Our findings evidence the conflicted and fractured nature of public memory both *between* and *within* national communities. Memory scholars increasingly challenge the “ideal of national cultural integrity” (Graves/Rechniewski 2010, 4) Yet the notion of “memory without borders” (Huyssen 2003, 4) is resisted by “gatekeepers of memory” - public institutions and media such as national broadcasters and newspapers revive, reinvent, disseminate and claim recognition for nationally coded authoritative narratives understood along the lines of filiative genealogies and alliances. Bond and Rapson (2014, 18) have rightly questioned “whether the most idealistic aspects of memory theory actually reflect the complexity of how commemoration works in practice.” In the case of *14 – Great War Diaries*, the localized versions mimic the transmission of communicative memory in a hypermedia setting, offering an interpretation of the past through the seemingly authentic plurality and diversity of testimonial voices while still promoting a national memory narrative informed by unacknowledged ideological agendas and vested political interests. Instead of using personal and vernacular recollections to recognize not only the plurality of lived experiences but also the highly diverse practices of remembering and their dialogic relation to each other, placing them in the wider context of contestations over the interpretation of the past and the stakes involved, the archive is appropriated to create and reinforce communality through vernacular, localized and yet nevertheless hegemonic narratives.

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